Note: The Education Report can be viewed online at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/news/report/

BRITISH COLUMBIA The Best Place on Earth
Ministry of Education
EDUCATION REPORT

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Message from Minister Shirley Bond

Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister of Education

School districts across British Columbia are invited to take part in the Trees for Tomorrow program, recently introduced by the Ministry of Community Development. The Trees for Tomorrow program will plant four million trees in school yards, hospital grounds, civic parks and other public spaces in the province.

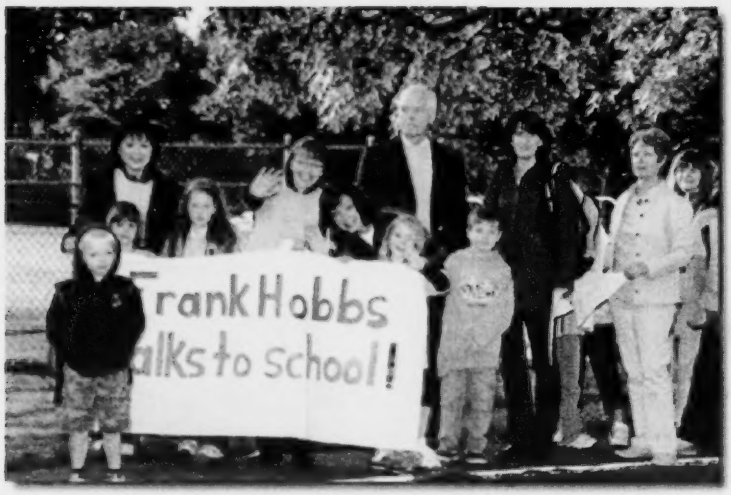
The Trees for Tomorrow program works towards the government's goal to reduce emissions by at least 33 per cent below current levels by 2020. The Province is investing in a range of climate change initiatives that are designed to encourage environmentally friendly choices by individuals, business and communities.

I encourage school districts to take part in this program. It is an effective and easy way for schools districts to add green space on school grounds. In areas that have been affected by the pine beetle, the Trees for Tomorrow program will combat the damage by replacing destroyed trees, with new and healthy ones. This builds on the $1 million the Province provided to school boards in 2006 to offset the cost of removing trees from school grounds affected by the mountain pine beetle.

The Province will fund up to 50 per cent of a Trees for Tomorrow project, with funding available up to a maximum of $50,000.

You can visit www.treesfortomorrow.gov.bc.ca for more information and to download an application form. The deadline for application is December 15, 2008.

Students Go Green with Walking School Bus



Education Minister Shirley Bond marked International Walk to School Day with Technology, Trade and Economic Development Minister Ida Chong and Minister of Healthy Living and Sport Mary Polak at Frank Hobbs Elementary school. The Ministers challenged B.C. schools across the province to go "green" by setting up a walking school bus or bicycle train to reduce their carbon footprint. Walking school buses and bicycle trains function like a conventional school bus by making predetermined stops to pick up and drop off students on the way to and from school. The province is providing $200,000 to provide tools and incentives to help schools get started. Read more.

HOT TOPIC

Boards of Education across the province are approving their class size numbers this week. Principals have worked together with parents and teachers to make important decisions about class size. Their decisions then need approval from district superintendents and boards of education.

The School Act stipulates that no class in Grades 4-7 is to include more than 30 students, except with the consent of the classroom teacher and approval of the principal and district superintendent. The district average class size for Grades 4-7 must not exceed 28 students. In Grades 8-12 no class should have more than the district average of 30 students, except with approval of the principal and superintendent, and consultation with the classroom teacher.

The Province requires districts to provide solid rationale based on sound educational reasons whenever a class exceeds 30 students. In some cases, class size numbers are being exceeded to accommodate an extra student or a particular class is organized for instructional or program purposes, such as band or physical education classes. Schools need the flexibility to organize in the best way possible to meet the needs of students.

Last year marked the second year in a row that more than 95 per cent of classes in our province had 30 or fewer students. Ninety-nine per cent of classes had 32 or fewer students. And classes with more than 30 students have decreased by close to 66 per cent throughout B.C. since the first class size report was issued in 2005-06.

Ministry of Education statistics show that there was one educator for every 16.2 students in the B.C. public school system during in 2007-08.

That's the lowest student-to-educator ratio in the Province since 1990-91.

Last year, all 60 districts complied with the legislation, and we are continuing to monitor class sizes throughout the province and work with parents, students, teachers and school districts to ensure optimal learning conditions.

Reading Corner

This month's book selection is for older students who enjoy a futuristic voyage of the imagination. "Unwind" is about three teenagers living in the future where their purpose in life is to provide for other people. But when they escape, looking for a better life, they are cared for by sympathetic adults. The story is one of suspense, struggle and salvation through community, and is suitable for secondary students.

Unwind
Neal Shusterman